



HELPFILE

PUT YOUR QUESTIONS TO OUR TECHNICAL EXPERTS

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HELPFILE

Paul Mullen answers your computing queries

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CONTACTING HELPFILE

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When writing to *Helpfile*, please try to give full details of your problem. We also require both daytime and evening phone numbers in case we need more information. Although the policy of *Computer Shopper* is not to publish readers' email addresses, we include them in *Helpfile* so that other readers with experience of similar problems can share their solution (please also cc any comments to helpfile@computershopper.co.uk). If you would prefer not to have your email address published, please say so.

PAUL MULLEN

Paul has been a transport demand forecaster, economic adviser to the government and IT consultant to many big companies, and has been using and writing software for personal computers since 1978

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RAM DIAGNOSTICS

WHICH MEMORY TYPE DO I NEED?

Q Two years ago I purchased a Time computer from the Computer Shop in West Thurrock. As you are aware, Time and Tiny have since moved on to pastures new. I need to upgrade my memory, but to work out the correct setup I need to know my PC's model number. Can you help?

Terry Delannoy, terrydel@supanet.com

A All you need to know is what kind of memory is already installed in your system. One way to find out is to open the case, remove the memory module and take it with you when you go to buy more memory. If you do this, don't put the memory in an ordinary plastic bag. Unless it's made of anti-static material, a plastic bag may generate static electricity that could damage the memory chips. Instead, wrap the memory module in aluminium foil.

Another method is to visit www.cpubid.com/cpuz.php and download the free CPU-Z program. This will identify the number and type of memory modules in your system. It also generates a confusing amount of information that you won't need. You simply need to know the memory type (either DDR or standard SDRAM) and the speed.

If your system uses SDRAM (not DDR), the speed of memory module you will need is either 66, 100 or 133MHz. In practice PC133 modules work in most recent systems.

DDR RAM speeds can be confusing because DDR transfers two bytes of data for each clock cycle, so its speed in MHz is double the memory clock rate CPU-Z shows. This is often different to the processor bus speed. The PC speed rating is 16 times the clock speed reported by CPU-Z.

When CPU-Z reports a DDR memory bus speed of 133MHz, that means data is transferred at 266MHz. If you multiply this by eight, as there are eight bytes in a memory transfer, and round it down, you get a bandwidth of 2,100MB/s. That's why 133MHz DDR is known as PC2100 memory. Similarly, a 166MHz memory bus transfers data at 333MHz, so you need PC2700 memory. A 200MHz bus requires PC3200 memory.

To clarify this, look at the SPD tab, where CPU-Z describes how the existing memory reports itself to the system. This will show a number such as PC2100, PC2700 and so on. If you can't get exactly the same memory, faster modules will usually work, although a few motherboards may have compatibility issues. Try PC133 instead of PC100, or PC2700 instead of PC2100 DDR.

Finally, if you click the About tab in CPU-Z, you'll find a button for creating an HTML report. Click this and print out the report. The last line of the memory section tells you exactly what you need. *Shopper* recommends a minimum of 256MB and preferably 512MB of memory to run Windows XP. Use more if you run memory-intensive design or video-editing applications.



▲ It's essential that you install the correct type and speed of memory module in your PC

FEEDBACK SECURITY

GETTING RID OF UNWANTED SUSPICIOUS FILES



In *Helpfile, Shopper* November 2005 you answered a question from John Brown about deleting a suspicious file. I have successfully used another method on a few occasions to do this.

First, find the file and note its location. Next, start a command prompt and navigate to the folder that contains the offending file.

You still can't delete the file, but often you can rename it, so call it something like 'junk'. Then exit the command prompt and reboot the computer. When it restarts, the original file will not run because it has been renamed. You can then go back and delete the renamed file because it is no longer in use.

John Spink, jspink@fastmail.fm



MICROSOFT WORKS OLD DLL

DYNAMIC LINK LIBRARY PROBLEM

Q My PC displays the following message when it boots up: "SPRINGFLD ADV DAEMON: WksCal.exe. - Entry Point Not... The procedure entry point GrtlUMS could not be located in the dynamic link library MSDART.DLL".

Can you identify the problem and provide a solution?

R Huntington, rglhuntington@tiscali.co.uk

A I am puzzled by the reference to "Springfld Adv Daemon", but WksCal.exe is a calendar program that's part of

Microsoft Works, a package that is often supplied with new computers. If you have Works on your computer, several Works modules start up whenever you start your computer.

The rest of the error message indicates that you have an incorrect version of the Msdart.dll file. WksCal expects to find one that contains a procedure called GetlUMS. This file is part of Microsoft Data Access Components (MDAC), and you need version 2.8. Version 2.7 and earlier don't include this procedure.

You have probably performed a repair installation of Windows, which previously had a

Service Pack (SP1 or SP2) loaded, using a Windows XP CD that doesn't contain that Service Pack. Or it may be that another application that needs the MDAC components, such as Windows Media Player 10, installed the required file version.

Search your hard disk for the file called Msdart.dll. You may find that you have more than one copy on your system. Copy the latest version to the Windows\System32 folder. Alternatively, reinstalling SP2 and Windows Media Player 10 should fix the error. You can also download MDAC version 2.8 from the Microsoft Downloads website at www.microsoft.com/downloads.

EMAIL CORRUPT INDEXES

OUTLOOK EXPRESS IS ON STRIKE

Q Outlook Express has suddenly decided not to work. It was working fine, but then one day it wouldn't start when I tried to access it. I contacted Microsoft but was told that as my copy is an OEM version I must contact my supplier. My supplier was Multivision, which no longer exists. I have tried uninstalling and reinstalling Outlook Express without success.

When I start Outlook Express the opening page appears, but this is replaced almost immediately by the error message "Outlook Express could not be started. The application was unable to open the Outlook Express message store. Your computer may be out of memory or your disk is full."

I have a 180GB hard disk with several gigabytes of free disk space, and the PC has 1GB of RAM, which ought to be adequate. I am using BT broadband and Windows XP Home Edition with Service Pack 1. I have resorted to using Yahoo! Mail to send and receive emails.

Don Whittaker, donwhittaker@yahoo.co.uk

A This message can have several possible causes. The least likely is the one your PC suggests: your hard disk may be full. It's still worth checking this first, though. It is also a good idea to run chkdsk to see if the drive's file system has any problems that might prevent it accessing Outlook Express's data. To do this, open My Computer, right-click on the C: drive icon and choose Properties. Next, select the Tools tab and click Check Now. Choose the option to fix file system errors automatically. There's no need to check for bad sectors. The system will probably tell you that it can't do this while system files are open and offer to check files on the next reboot. Click the Yes button.

Sometimes a corrupted or missing program file can cause the problem. The best way to fix problems with program files or settings is to uninstall and reinstall the application. This hasn't worked for you, but other readers could try removing Outlook Express from the Add/Remove Programs section of Control Panel. It will be listed

under Windows Components. After removing it and rebooting your PC, you can go back to the same place and check Outlook Express to reinstall it.

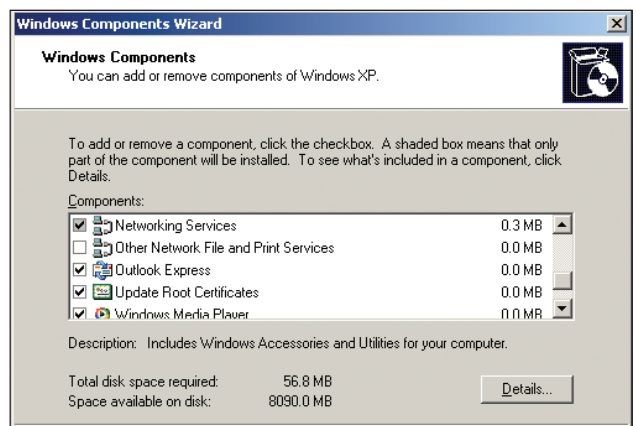
A more likely cause of your problem is that one or more of the message store dbx files have become corrupted. To locate these files, search for Inbox.dbx. Make sure you include hidden files and folders in the search options.

Alternatively, open Windows Explorer and, in the Tools menu, select Folder Options. Click on the View tab and select the option to Show hidden files and folders. Once you have done this, click Documents & Settings, then your user profile name. This may be set to something like 'owner'. Next, click into Local Settings, Application Data, Identities, and a folder named with a very long string of hex characters. Finally, open Microsoft Outlook Express.

If there is more than one folder under Identities, check each to see which contains the largest files. When Outlook Express creates a new profile it creates a 137KB Inbox.dbx file.

Now that you have found your message store folder, you can check that none of the folders is marked as read only. If they are, Outlook Express won't start. Also make sure that none is bigger than 2GB. Assuming they all look OK, check for corruption by creating a temporary folder and moving all the files into it. Make sure your PC is not connected to the internet because you don't want to download any new messages just yet. When you restart Outlook Express it should create a new set of empty folders.

If Outlook Express starts, you know that the problem lies with one of the dbx files. If so, exit Outlook Express, delete the files it has just created and move all the old files, except Folders.dbx, back into the original folder. When you restart Outlook Express, it will recreate the Folders.dbx file. You will



Removing and reinstalling an application is the best way to fix corrupted or missing program files and settings. Do this with Add/Remove Programs in Control Panel

lose Newsgroups settings and filtering rules, and the folder hierarchy may change.

If this does not work, exit Outlook Express, delete Folders.dbx and move the other files back to the temporary folder. Restart Outlook Express so that it creates new folders, and use File Import to import each message folder separately. You can rescue any folders it can't import with either dbxtract from www.oehelp.com/dbxtract or the free Macallan Outlook Express extraction program from <http://macallan.club.fr>.

Finally, there may be a corrupted identity profile in your Registry. Outlook Express stores data about each identity in the Windows Registry under the key HKey_Current_User, Identities.

Click on Start, Run, type in RegEdit and click OK, then navigate to HKey_Current_User. Highlight Identities, right-click on it and choose Export. Choose a filename and location, then right-click the entry and choose Delete.

If you now double-click the file you just created, the Registry will re-import the entries. Sometimes exporting, deleting and re-importing will clear a Registry problem. If that doesn't work, go back to RegEdit, delete the Identities key again and, when you restart Outlook Express, create a new profile, re-entering all your account details.

CD-R HIGH-CAPACITY DISCS

I CAN'T USE CD-R90 DISCS

Q Please can you tell me how to write Philips CD-R90 discs to their full 800MB capacity? I have Roxio and Sonic software but I cannot work out how to get them to write more than 700MB.

Mike Bedford, bedford_michael@hotmail.com

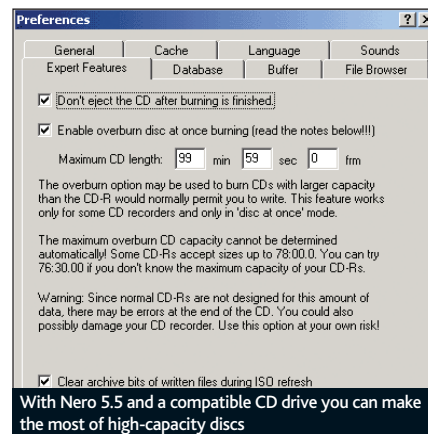
A CD-R discs come in two standard sizes: 650MB (or 74 minutes of CD audio) and 700MB (80 minutes). To burn high-capacity R90 or R99 discs you need a compatible CD drive and burning software. Only drives that burn at 24X or greater are likely to be compatible with high-capacity CDs.

There is no simple way for software to read the size of a high-capacity CD. If you try to write more data to a disc than it can accommodate, the last thing that's written, which is usually the

directory information, will fail. This renders the entire disc useless. For this reason, all CD-burning software assumes a maximum capacity, which is usually 700MB (or 80 minutes) and will not allow you to exceed it.

Most CD-burning software has a default limit of 79 minutes 59 seconds of music. As an audio CD plays at 150KB/s, this is equivalent to about 700MB of data. R90 discs should support 90 minutes of music, or up to 791MB of data. The actual file capacity is always a little less. R99 discs support 99 minutes 59 seconds of music, or up to 878MB of data.

Roxio's Easy CD has a fixed limit of 700MB. The company says that the R90 and R99 formats violate CD-R specifications and may cause problems, so it refuses to support them. To burn larger discs you need different software.



With Nero 5.5 and a compatible CD drive you can make the most of high-capacity discs

Nero (5.5 or later) burns high-capacity discs up to 99 minutes 59 seconds, but you have to go into Preferences and click on the Expert tab. Check the Allow overburn setting and set an appropriate limit.

TELETEXT STANDARDS

TV CARD HAS NO TELETEXT

Q I have a Tiny PCI Express 630 PC with a TwinHan DTV PCI card, version 2.421. My problem is that I can't make Teletext work or scan any of the interactive channels (100-105). All the TV and radio channels work perfectly. The reception in my area is generally good, my aerial is fine and the picture quality on my digital television is superb. What's going wrong?

Heikky Lomp

A The UK pioneered Teletext, and other countries are only just starting to introduce similar services – and only

for digital TV. This has enabled them to adopt new standards, while the UK has stuck with the same standard used for analogue TV broadcasts.

The industry has tried to agree on international standards, and most of the world (except the USA, Canada, Mexico, Japan and South Korea) has agreed to use the DVB standard for digital TV. However, there are several competing standards for text services and channels that you pay for. Most countries use a standard called DVB-MHP for digital text, but the UK uses a system called MHEG-5, which is based on the original Teletext services.

As a result, only those DTV cards that have been designed for the UK market are likely to



▲ Only TV cards designed for the UK are likely to support Teletext, unlike the TwinHan here

support our Teletext. TwinHan cards do not support the UK version of text services yet, although the company suggests that perhaps, one day, there will be a software upgrade to do so. Pinnacle and V-Stream both have UK-specific models that support Teletext.

INTERNET DELETED ICONS

FAVOURITES BAR ICONS GO AWOL

Q When I save an organisation's website on Internet Explorer's toolbar, it often shows the company logo. For example, easyJet brings up its orange logo, while Amazon displays a small version of its insignia.

These logos remain on the toolbar for a couple of weeks and then disappear. Sometimes only a few go missing, but at other times the whole lot disappears. Why does this happen? Is there a way I can make them stay for as long as I need them?

Ken Latham, ken@wildwales.com

A When you create a short cut to a website or add it to your Favorites, Internet Explorer looks for and downloads a file called favicon.ico from the website. By default it looks first in the folder that contains the web page, then in the website's root directory. This file contains the icon you see on your shortcuts.

Some websites may specify a different filename or location by adding a line to the header of each page that reads something like this:

```
<link rel="shortcut icon" href="/favicon.ico" type="image/x-icon" />
```

Unfortunately, thanks to bad design by Microsoft, Internet Explorer stores this icon file in the Temporary Internet Files folder. Whenever you clear your temporary internet files the icon file is lost. If Internet Explorer is scheduled to delete your temporary files after a set period, the icon is also removed. After that, Windows cannot find the custom icon and displays the default Internet Explorer icon instead. The Firefox web browser does not seem to suffer from this problem.

You can download the missing icons. For example, type www.yahoo.com/favicon.ico into the address bar and you should see the red 'Y!'

icon. Right-click this icon and choose Save as, and you can save it to a safe location on your hard disk. I suggest creating a folder called Favicons, then saving each with a name that matches the site name. Then you can right-click on the short cut with the missing icon, choose Properties, click the Change Icon button and enter the path to the location of your saved icon.

This is rather time-consuming if you have a lot of shortcuts to fix. Luckily, the US publication *PC Magazine* provides a utility on its website that automates the process. You can find it at www.pcmag.com/article2/0,4149,9883,00.asp.

A similar utility is FavIconizer from www.codeproject.com/tools/faviconizer.asp. You need to register with the site before downloading it. These utilities handle shortcuts in the Favorites folder only, but once you have used them to update your Favorites, you can drag the shortcuts to the desktop or anywhere else.



FACTFILE

REGION-FREE DVD

Region locking was introduced by the film industry, but it can be frustrating if you travel with your notebook and want to watch locally bought DVDs. Here are a few ways to get round it

Q I live in the UK but my work takes me to many different countries. I recently bought a Sony Vaio VGN-S1VP notebook specifically to take with me on my overseas trips.

The DVD player has become locked to Region 2. This is no help to me when I'm in India or South America and want to watch a locally sold DVD. I wrote to Sony but the company said it was a policy to lock the DVD and it would not make it region-free. How can the notebook be mobile if it's locked to a specific region?

The DVD burner is a Matshita UJ-812. Is there software available that will unlock this model or a DVD burner that I can install in my laptop to make it region-free?

Stuart Jones, stjones2003@yahoo.co.uk

A Region locking was introduced by the film industry because film studios had a habit of releasing new films in Europe months after they opened in the USA, and at about the same time as the film started to appear on DVD in the USA. To stop people watching films on DVD at the same time as they were released in cinemas, the industry wanted to lock all DVD players so that they could play DVDs for just one region.

You can change the region five times, after which the manufacturer can change it a limited number of times. However, you are stuck if you want to watch DVDs encoded for different regions.

This was a stupid idea. After all, many films are released on DVD in the USA and never in the UK. Many standalone home DVD players are now region-free and can play all DVDs. As you point out, notebook computers are often used in different countries. If you want to

watch DVDs frequently, you have a choice of either buying only imported Region 1 DVDs or making your DVD player region-free.

Three sections of the system are involved in region-locking a DVD drive. There is the DVD drive itself, your DVD decoder software such as PowerDVD or WinDVD (or, more rarely, a hardware DVD decoder board) and Windows XP. All three of these must be set to the correct Region before you can play a region-encoded DVD. Even if the drive itself is region-free, Windows will impose its own software region locking when you right-click on the DVD drive icon and choose Properties.

One way to make a DVD drive region-free is to download a version of the firmware that lacks region protection. Unless you are really lucky and the DVD maker has produced a region-free version, this means using firmware that a hacker has modified, which is a risky business. You can download a driveinfo utility that reports whether your drive is region-locked in hardware from www.remoteselector.com/driveinfo.htm.

Even then, you would have to hack both your DVD player software and Windows. There is a good but slightly outdated guide to this approach at www.digital-digest.com/dvd/articles/region_detect.html. It includes links to firmware patches. The driveinfo utility can identify your drive model. The site also has a list of utilities that enable you to get round the region change limit for different software DVD decoders. DVD Genie from www.inmatrix.com is the best, but this works only if your DVD drive hardware is region-free.

However, an alternative approach that's newer and simpler involves using the free dvd43 utility, which makes the computer think any DVD is region-free. Unfortunately, its

authors seem to have abandoned it and gone into hiding, probably because they're afraid of being prosecuted under the United States Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DCMA) of 1998. A company called DVDIdle appears to have purchased the rights to it and sells several products based on its code. You can still download an old version of dvd43 from www.dvdidle.net/dvd43.htm.

Given the far-reaching nature of the DCMA, few sites will distribute the program. The website www.dvd43.com claims to have no connection with the software's authors but links to several download locations. The file is about 500KB, which shouldn't be too much even over a slow internet connection. For the latest version, I suggest you try www.afterdawn.com/software/video_software/dvd_rippers/dvd43.cfm.

For a similar, commercial program, try DVDIdle's DVD Region Free Lite, which is based on dvd43 code and costs around \$24.95 (around £15).



WINDOWS XP WITH 98

DUAL-BOOTING A NEW COMPUTER

Q I have just bought a Dell computer with Windows XP and would like to use Windows 98 on it as well. I have a Windows 98 installation CD, but I understand from an earlier article in your magazine that I can't install Windows 98 after XP, or at least not without difficulty, but can install XP after 98.

The technical support team at Dell can't help but has promised to send me the Windows XP installation disc. I don't know how complete it will be. I haven't used the Dell yet, except to check that it works, but I know that it uses the NTFS file system, which is incompatible with the FAT32 system in Windows 98. I hope to uninstall XP, install Windows 98 and then re-install XP with the FAT32 filing system.

My original plan was to install Windows XP on my present computer and then move the hard disk to the Dell, resetting the Master/Slave connections on the two drives. But that would leave me with the problem of having the NTFS file system on one of the disks.

Are there any other options? What is the best way to get a PC that dual-boots between Windows XP and 98, with both using FAT32?
Harold Eckersall

A During installation, Windows is configured with drivers for the hardware on which it is running. So it is not advisable to install Windows XP on one PC and then move the hard disk to another unless the two PCs are identical.

If there is nothing you want to save on the hard disk, boot from a Windows 98 startup disk, use Fdisk to remove the existing NTFS partition and create two FAT32 partitions, one for each operating system. I advise against creating a FAT32 partition larger than 63GB.

There will also be a small Dell diagnostics partition, which you should keep intact. Use your Windows 98 CD to install Windows 98 in the first FAT32 partition. All the Dell computers I have seen come with a full Windows XP CD. Boot from that and install XP in the second FAT32 partition.

If you don't want to delete everything on the hard disk, use a partition management utility, such as VCOM's Partition Commander, to resize the existing partition.

INTERNET MISSING SITE

PROXY SERVER PROBLEM

Q I am having difficulty downloading a program update. When I try to get the file from this particular website, a proxy server address of 127.0.0.1 appears at the beginning of the download. This blocks the download with an error message that says "A connection with the server could not be established".

I have been into Internet Options, Internet Properties on my notebook and have now erased this address, and in the Settings section I have ticked the Automatically detect settings box. However, this address continues to appear when I try to download from the site, so I am still unable to get a download.

I believe that GhostSurf caused the problem originally, because when I deleted this program it cleared the address from my Internet Properties. I have searched my hard disk to find any other places this address may be hiding, but to no avail. Is this address being generated from my hard disk? How can I erase it or get around it to download my update?
Arthur McPhee, amcphee481@aol.com

A GhostSurf may have caused your problem, but not necessarily. In fact, I suspect that spyware is to blame. We'll explain how to find out if spyware has been messing with your system, but just in case GhostSurf is at fault, we'll show you how to check for other problems too.

The main issue is that Windows wants to access the site you need through a proxy server that's running on your own computer, hence the error message. The 127.0.0.1 address refers to the local system, rather than a computer on the internet. At some stage you may have been running a proxy, which has now gone. If your web browser settings expect to find a proxy that's no longer available, you won't be able to make connections.

Not all proxy servers running on your computer are good. While some can be used to filter websites that you visit, provide parental controls, block ads and form part of an anti-spyware solution, spyware can also use them to monitor what you are doing and perhaps add its own adverts to other sites' web pages.

GhostSurf, which was included on the cover disc that came free with *Shopper* December 2005, is a proxy program that protects your anonymity by routing all your web page requests through a remote proxy server. The websites you visit see only the request from the proxy server and send the page back to that proxy server, which then forwards it to you. That way, only the proxy server knows your real IP address. If you removed GhostSurf, you would have to check your web browser's settings and remove the 127.0.0.1 proxy entry, as you have done.

Other readers should bear in mind that if they remove a proxy server that's running on their computer without removing the references to it in the Registry, or in the Internet Options panel, all web access (apart from 'excepted' sites) will fail. Removing a spyware proxy might also leave these settings in place.

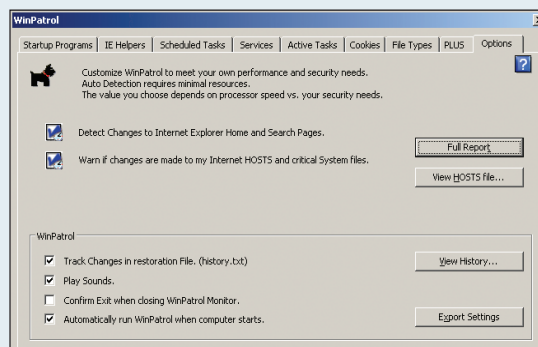
To check proxy settings for Internet Explorer, look in Control Panel, Internet Options and click on the Connections tab. Click the LAN Settings button. In Firefox, click on Tools, Options and, at the bottom of the General tab, click Connection Settings.

THE HOSTS FILE

As you have already checked your proxy settings, the main suspect is your hosts file. This text file is located in the C:\Windows\System32\Drivers\etc folder in Windows XP or 2000, or in C:\Windows in older versions of Windows. It is a basic file that can contain a list of server addresses and corresponding IP addresses. If a server is listed in this file, Windows uses the supplied IP address rather than looking up the site's address on the internet using DNS.

As with proxies, the hosts file can be useful but is open to abuse. Programs such as Spybot Search & Destroy add the addresses of known spyware distribution sites to this list, each with the IP address of 127.0.0.1. This blocks access because, when you try to visit them, the web browser looks to your own system to provide the pages rather than to the internet.

However, many viruses and spyware programs also use the hosts file, adding the names of anti-virus and anti-spyware websites to the list, again



Stop criminals secretly diverting your browser to their sites by checking the hosts file – or get software such as WinPatrol to do it for you

usually with an address of 127.0.0.1. This stops you downloading updates and seeking advice. My favourite ad-blocker program, Ads-Gone, uses the list to block advertising sites such as <http://ads.doubleclick.net>.

You can even use the hosts file as a harmless April Fool trick. Look up the IP addresses of a few common sites such as Yahoo! or Google and then enter their names in the hosts file, but type in the wrong IP addresses next to each. For example, enter a line for www.yahoo.com with the IP address of www.google.com.

As the hosts file can divert web traffic to a site other than the intended one, it can be very dangerous. If a criminal gang can persuade you to download a piece of software that's capable of editing your hosts file, they could change it so that entering the name of your internet banking site takes you to a server run by the criminal gang. If this were a proxy server that forwarded all requests to your bank's real site, you would never know that it was secretly recording account numbers and passwords.

I strongly suggest that everyone runs software that monitors their hosts file and warns you of any changes that are made to it. Microsoft Antispyware (for Windows 2000 and XP) and WinPatrol, which runs on any version of Windows, do this. At the very least, you should check the file by opening it in Notepad. If the site you are trying to access is listed, remove it and the IP address next to it. If that doesn't work, try restarting your web browser.

GRAPHICS DISAPPEARING ICON

VANISHING ATI SYMBOL

Q The ATI symbol always used to appear on the taskbar at the bottom right of my screen. Now it vanishes whenever I boot my computer, only to appear again when I change the resolution in the advanced setup. The symbol then remains there until I shut down the PC.

All the appropriate boxes in the advanced setup are checked, but it still disappears when I reboot. What can I do to get the symbol back

automatically when I boot up the PC?

*Don Robertson,
robertsondon20002000@yahoo.com*

A The ATI icon comes from a Quick Resolution Change utility, which should run on startup. The name of this program starts with 'ati'. Someone may have removed it while trying to speed up the boot process or removing spyware.

Click Start, Run and type msconfig. This brings up the System Configuration utility. Look in the Startup tab to see if the check has been removed from any programs with names that start with ati.

If you have run an anti-spyware utility such as HijackThis, look in its quarantine folder for any entries that might belong to ATI. If you don't find the cause, the simplest solution is to reinstall the latest drivers for your ATI video card. This should reinstall the icon too.



WINDOWS ACTIVATION

MOTHERBOARD CHANGEOVER

Q I need to install a new motherboard in a 1GHz computer running Windows XP Home Edition. We have only a restore disc that puts the software back to factory settings, as the software was pre-loaded. Changing the motherboard is no problem, but I have a couple of concerns.

How will Windows XP react to the new motherboard? Will I have to re-register the software? Should I delete all the old motherboard drivers just before I make the switch, or just after?

Ian White, member@induction72.freemove.co.uk

A There are two issues here. First, your new motherboard is likely to use a different chipset from your old one, especially if it has onboard video. So a Windows XP installation that uses drivers for the old board is likely to lock up when you try to run it on the new board. The best solution is to do a repair installation of Windows on top of the existing installation. This will replace the old drivers with the correct ones for the new board.

A repair installation requires a full Windows XP CD, or at least a recovery partition that includes a repair option. If your CD allows you to restore only the original factory software, it would simply restore the drivers for the old motherboard.

If you are careful, you can go into Device Manager and delete all the drivers for the old

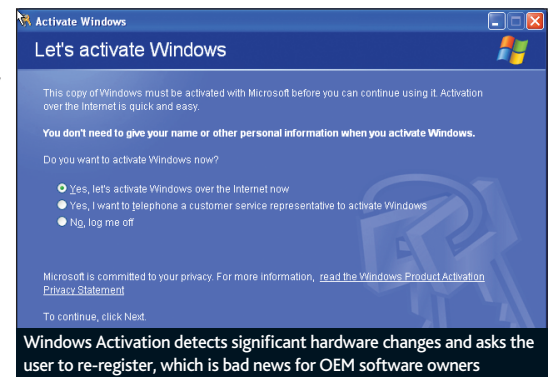
motherboard chipset before you replace the motherboard. You will need to replace key devices such as IDE controllers and video with generic devices. Then, when it restarts, Windows should detect new devices. This can be messy, though, and a repair installation of Windows is much better – provided you have the CD.

It might be possible to create your own Windows CD but there is a second problem: Windows Activation. If your computer came with only a restore CD you will have an OEM version of Windows. OEM versions are sold for much less than the full price but with the restriction that they can be used only on the computer with which they were supplied. The trouble is, what do we mean by the computer with which it was supplied?

Many users replace all the parts of their system gradually: they get a bigger hard disk one year, more memory and a new graphics card the next, a new motherboard and processor the following year. Microsoft takes the view that it is the motherboard that defines a computer. You can change everything else but, if you keep the same motherboard, it still regards it as the same computer. If you change the motherboard, Microsoft says that it is no longer the computer that Windows was supplied with and that you have to buy a new copy of Windows.

The company can detect when you try to use its software with a new PC due to Windows Activation. Every time Windows starts up it checks the hardware it is running on and, if it has changed significantly from the previous time the PC booted, Windows demands that you reactivate it. For users with a full copy of Windows this is not a problem. At worst they may have to telephone Microsoft, explain that they have upgraded the motherboard and promise that they are using this copy of Windows only on one computer.

However, if you have an OEM copy of Windows, Microsoft's policy is to allow you to reactivate only if your original motherboard failed, forcing you to replace it.



XBOX HARD DISK

RETRIEVING SAVED GAMES FROM A DEAD XBOX

Q My Xbox recently stopped working. When I tried to access the memory option, it showed zero blocks free of zero available. The music directory was completely inaccessible, too. I had taken out a warranty from Dixons when I bought the console, and I have received vouchers for a new one but I have lost all my saved games files, which amounted to quite a few over the past three-and-a-bit years.

I decided to dismantle the Xbox and I connected the hard disk to my computer, a 1.4GHz Athlon with 640MB of RAM running Windows XP Professional. The BIOS reported that it had found a hard disk with a 10,009MB capacity but it does not appear in My Computer in Windows. When I look under Device Manager it shows up under disk drives, providing a make and serial number.

As it appears to be OK in the BIOS and in Windows, perhaps the problem is that some of the core operating files have been deleted and the drive itself is OK. If this is the case, how can I access the drive to copy my saved games across to my computer?

Stephen Ward,
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▲ The Xbox is just a PC in disguise and can even run a specially designed version of Linux

A Microsoft is somewhat secretive about the internal workings of the Xbox, but of course hackers have delved into its file systems. The Xbox operating system is a cut-down member of the Windows NT family and its drive partitions are based on the standard DOS FAT16 and FAT32 partitions. However, they do not have the partition table or boot sector that Windows

needs in order to recognise the partitions. Instead, all Xbox units have five fixed-size hard disk partitions: three game cache partitions, each of which is 750MB in size, followed by a 500MB system files partition. There is also a partition for saved games that starts at sector 5633024.

The first four partitions use a FAT16 file-allocation table, while the last uses FAT32. Each of these FATX partitions, as they are called, has a short header starting with 'FATX', where the boot sector would normally be.

As the Xbox is just a PC in disguise, with a Celeron 733MHz processor, 64MB of RAM, four USB ports disguised as joystick ports and an 8GB or 10GB hard disk, you can run PC operating systems such as Linux on it. There is even a special version of Linux designed specifically to run on the Xbox. You can download it from www.xbox-linux.org and create a bootable CD.

To run it you would have to modify the Xbox software so that it boots from a CD. There is no need to modify the hardware. However, the software modifications prevent you connecting to the Xbox Live service.

You should also be able to connect your Xbox hard disks to a regular PC and use the Xbox Linux CD to boot it up. You could then copy the saved games files from the old Xbox hard disk to the new one. **CS**